

# Tech Snacks: Accessibility Resources

Accessibility resource services and student accommodations can feel like a bit of a black box to instructors. How do students ask for an accommodation? Who decides if an accommodation is reasonable? What is the instructor's responsibility in all this?

## What does the law say?

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, college faculty and institutions are responsible for ensuring that all students have access to course materials and assessments; that participation must be in the most integrated setting possible; that reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures based on the documentation of disability should be provided as necessary; and that there is no harassment or retaliation against individuals who are accessing their rights under the law or against those who are assisting people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

## How the accommodation process works

1. Students with a disability (i.e., learning, physical or mental) needing accommodations must complete and submit an application to the Accessibility Resource Coordinator.
2. Students must provide documentation of their disability. If the student is a freshman and had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan in high school, that's usually sufficient. Otherwise, current documentation or diagnosis from a doctor or specialist is required. *Unlike in High School, the student is responsible for obtaining this documentation.*
3. After the student submits an application and provides documentation of a disability, Accessibility Resource Services will have a conversation with the student to determine what accommodations would be appropriate to meet the student's needs.
4. If an accommodation is warranted, the Accessibility Resource Coordinator will send an accommodation notification form to the student's instructors, stating what accommodations the student is entitled to.
5. The instructor is then required to read, sign and return the form to the Accessibility Resource Coordinator. If the instructor has any questions or concerns, they are encouraged to ask the coordinator before the form is completed. Accommodations go into effect once the instructor receives notice. Accommodations are **not** retroactive.
6. When accommodations include things like extra time on tests or the ability to take a test in a quiet room, the instructor is required to grant those accommodations. A Test Proctor form is then filled out, by both student and instructor, and given to Belinda Potter at the Library. Once the form is received, Belinda will schedule the Test Proctoring time in one of the quiet rooms allotted in the Library.
7. If the student's accommodations include alternative textbook formats or assistance with testing, the student will work with the Accessibility Resource Coordinator to obtain those resources. OTLE may work with the instructor to host electronic texts in Brightspace, visible only to the student with an accommodation.
8. The student must make a new request to Accessibility Resource Services for accommodations each semester.

## What is "Reasonable Accommodation?"

Reasonable accommodations cannot fundamentally alter the content, curriculum, or outcomes of a course. Students with accommodations are still expected to learn all of the same content as the other students, and are still expected to pass the same assessments. The most common examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Extra time to complete tests.
- Taking tests in a separate, quiet room.
- Having access to alternative textbook formats, like audiobooks or PDFs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Americans with Disabilities Act – The Law and its Impact on Postsecondary Education. (2001). Association on Higher Education and Disability.

Examples of accommodation requests that are **not** reasonable include:

- Being given a shorter, easier, or otherwise fundamentally different test or assignment.
- Having different scoring or grading criteria from the rest of the class.
- Waiving course or program requirements.

It's important that you make sure a student has an official accommodation before you grant any special requests. If you make unofficial exceptions for one student, you'll be obligated to grant the exception to all students!

## What can you do if you think a student needs help?

It's a good idea to address the topic early in the semester to the whole class, especially freshman classes. Many students who had an IEP or a 504 Plan in High School and might assume that it automatically follows them to college. It doesn't! Those students need to bring their IEP or 504 documentation to Accessibility Resource Services and register for accommodations there.

If you suspect that an individual student might need an accommodation, the safest route is for you to first refer them to Student Support Services. SSS can connect the student with tutoring services and can refer the student to Accessibility Resource Services if appropriate.

It's also a good idea to include language in your syllabus about student rights and the accommodation process. OTLE suggests the following syllabus language:

### **Accessibility Statement**

As directed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), any students with physical or learning disabilities have access to a variety of services at MSU-Northern. In order to access these services, students are encouraged to meet with the Accessibility Resource Coordinator, Johnna Antonich. During the meeting the student will complete an application, provide documentation of their disability (an IEP from high school, any Veteran or DV, and/or clinical documentation from a licensed professional), and complete accommodations request forms for their courses.

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## Student Support Services/TRIO

TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) at Montana State University-Northern is a grant supported program through the Department of Education.

### **Who is eligible?**

Students are eligible for SSS services if they meet at least one of three eligibility categories, including: low income, first generation, or disabled. During Academic Year 2018-2019, 62% of MSUN students were eligible for SSS services. Of those, 34% were low income, 32% were first generation, 28% were both low income and first generation, and 6% were disabled.

### **What services are provided by SSS?**

- SSS offers a computer lab where participants can study and work on assignments, Monday – Friday, 8am to 5pm. Free printing is available in the SSS computer lab.
- SSS helps coordinate tutoring services on campus and can connect students to general or course-specific tutoring.
- Each semester, SSS purchases a textbook library with copies of required texts for all current courses at MSUN. SSS participants can use these books in the SSS area.
- SSS participants have access to social events, activities, advising, and study skills and life skills training sessions scheduled throughout the semester.
- Participants can take advantage of free coffee, popcorn, and other snacks.